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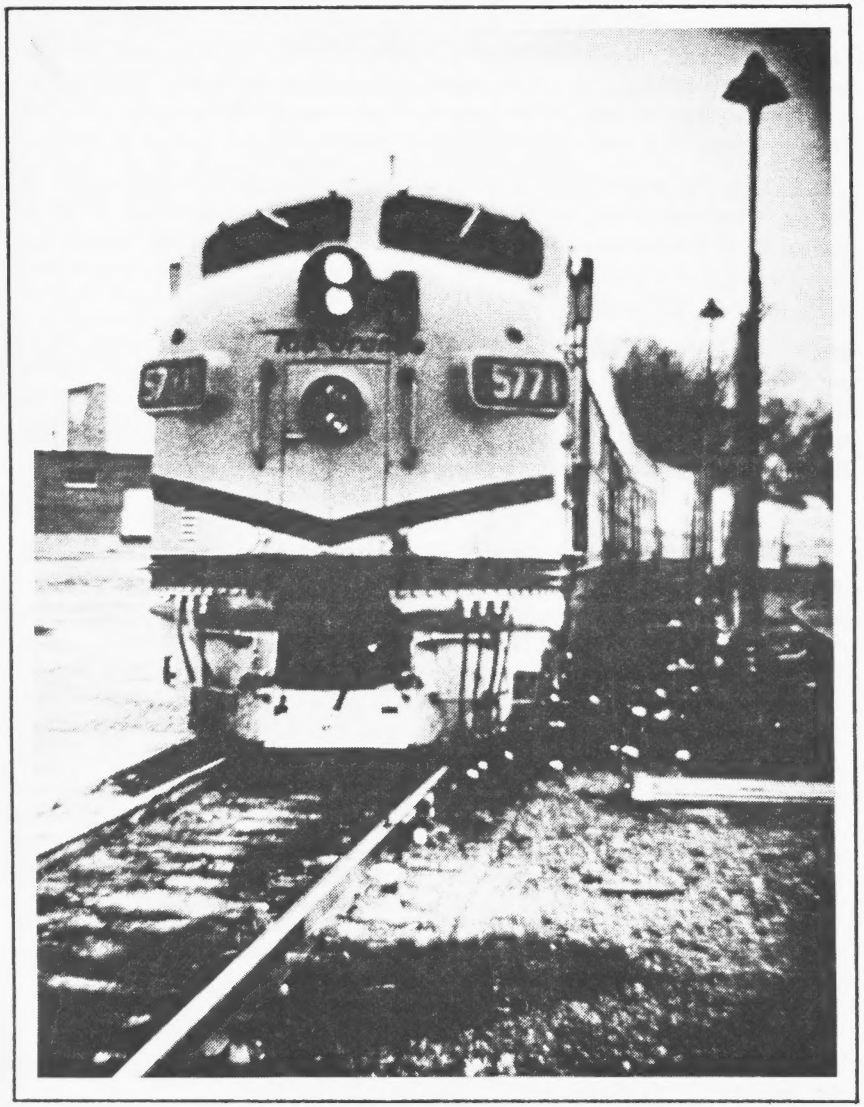


Express Ads

PASSENGER TRAINS of Canada, North American commuter trains and streetcars are among the new subjects added to Northwest Rail Images' line of color slide sets. Two Canadian sets featuring CN, CP, ONR, GO, ACR, NAR, PGE and E&N now join our three U.S. "Before Amtrak" sets. Other non-passenger sets available, too. Send an SSE for a revised list of 14 sets, or 25¢ for list and sample, to Northwest Rail Images, 4891 Donald Street, Eugene, Oregon 97405.

The Fast Mail: a monthly passenger train newsletter published by the Twentieth Century Railroad Club. Full of interesting news, comments, features, and more. For a one year (12 issue) subscription, send $2.75 to the Club at 10700 S. Seele Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60643.

WANTED: Old Railroad Public and Emply. timetables--steam and trolley--especially those dated before 1935--also annual passes from abandoned railroads in Colorado, Nevada and California, out-of-print railroad books, named train booklets or folders, railroad playing card decks, etc. Will buy one item or whole collection. D. C. Wornom, 1214 North LaSalle Street, Chicago, IL 60610.

CLEAR PLASTIC SLIP COVERS SPECIALLY DESIGNED FOR PUBLIC TIMETABLES 5¢ EACH. FREE SAMPLE. LARGE PUBLIC TIMETABLE CATALOG 50¢. Tom Coval, 21 East Robin Road, Holland, PA 18966.

THOSE NEW PASSENGER DIESELS everybody is talking about, get a photo of them! Be on our mailing list. A postcard will do. Will send list when new units arrive for service. SDP40F Photos, P. O. Box 986, Colton, California 92324.

ATTENTION COLLECTORS OF STAMPS, TRAVEL AND TRANSPORTATION HISTORIANA: Extra special offer listed here the first time. A modern-day philatelic error sure to increase in value and interest with the years! The six-cent special postcard issued last year by U.S. Postal Service, "Tourism Year of the Americas '72, Gloucester variety, with inverted pictorial printing on reverse. Image is also shifted downwards and to the right. Pictured recently in Western Stamp Collector. Sold at New York auction this month at $75. Message Media has acquired one it will offer to the first taker at $75 plus $1 shipping and insurance. A genuine collectors item and conversation piece. Write: Message Media, Philatelic Dept., Box 9007, Berkeley, California 94709. (Normal variety included for comparison.)

ON THE COVER: The non-Amtrak Denver & Rio Grande Western's tri-weekly RIO GRANDE ZEPHYR waits at Grand Junction, Colorado, in late February. Author Wes Roberts was a passenger on the train and stepped off to photograph it. Once home, he penned the report in this issue, entitled "The February 4000," in which he not only described this ZEPHYR, but recounted his varied adventures in the wilds of Chicago, Western Colorado, the Sierra, and other locations a few weeks ago in the late winter off-season.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT: It is with great pleasure that Rail Travel Newsletter announces the addition of two staff members to our gang. Kenneth A. Maylath becomes East Coast Correspondent. Mr. Maylath, who operates out of Baltimore, has already published several reports in RTN. Peter I. Roehm becomes Northeastern Correspondent. Mr. Roehm, of Rockport, Massachusetts, is a writer, advocate, collector and historian on transportation matters. We are delighted to have these new people with us, and with their help we hope to continue to improve our coverage of the passenger rail events large and small that are of most interest to you.

SUBSCRIBE TO THIS NEWSLETTER. Only six dollars per year for 24 issues. Back copies 25¢ each (see list in Dec. 4, 1972 issue). We have extended our offer on the first six issues of RTN for only $1--good for orders postmarked before April 1, 1973. (Ask for the "First Six Issues Pack.") Adress: Message Media, Dept. RTN, P.O. Box 9007, Berkeley, California 94709.

ADVERTISING RATES FOR RAIL TRAVEL NEWSLETTER: Express ads (80 characters and spaces per line)--up to 3 lines for $1.00 (minimum); additional lines 35¢ each, 3 for $1.00. Count typewriter spaces to gauge line length and send your ad copy with remittance to Message Media, Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709. Display ads: full page $10, half page $6, quarter page $3.50 for camera-ready copy. Write to same address.

AFTER TELLING YOU two issues ago that we would continue to indicate the projected mailing date of each issue of RTN, we neglected to do so the last two issues. So here goes, for those who like to keep tabs on their mail: the First Issue of February was mailed Feb. 16; the Second Issue of February was mailed March 2. We hope to get the present issue in the mail March 19.

Because of the short time interval between issues, we urge you to act promptly if your subscription is running out. Send us your renewal instructions as soon as possible after you are informed of the impending close of your present subscription, so you won't miss out on any issues. While RTN has what we believe is an extremely high renewal rate, a certain number of readers miss issues or suffer delays because they are not aware that we don't have the long time lag that monthly or less frequent publications have, and that no sooner is one issue in your mailbox than we are preparing the mailing list for the next. We don't want to lose you.

Rail Travel Newsletter, Vol. 3, No. 5 (Whole No. 55), First Issue of March, 1973. Published twice monthly by Message Media, P.O. Box 9007, Berkeley, California 94709. Subscription $6.00 per year; single copy 25¢. STAFF: James Russell, Editor; Paul Rayton, Editor-at-Large; Kenneth Maylath, East Coast Correspondent; Peter Roehm, Northeastern Correspondent; Doug Ellis, Staff Photographer.

SENATE VOTES TO BUST THE HIGHWAY TRUST FUND

By a vote of 49 to 44, the Senate decided March 14 to allow up to $850 million out of the $18 billion highway construction bill to be spent by urban areas at their discretion for mass transit, including rail and bus lines. The following day the same body approved the entire bill, and the House will take it up next, where it faces an uncertain future. Last year the Senate also passed such an amendment, but the House would not, and it died in a deadlock. The $18 billion is to cover a 3-year period. Two provisions of the Senate version were opposed by the Administration, altho it supported the trust fund busting idea in general: these were the provision of funds to help cover operating deficits of systems, and the requirement that the funds be free from impounding by the White House. The source of the $18 billion is $6 billion per year from taxes on gasoline, tires, and trucking tonnage.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION PLAN FOR AMTRAK IS PUBLISHED

Published March 15 but not available to us as we go to press is the DOT's plan for the future of Amtrak service. A brief summary in the media indicated that the DOT wants Amtrak to drop the Chicago-Florida FLORIDIAN, the New York-Kansas City NATIONAL LIMITED, the Washington-Parkersburg POTOMAC SPECIAL, and the Richmond-Newport News segment of the GEORGE WASHINGTON/JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY. The date for the elimination of these trains would be July 1. The $93 million proposed for Amtrak by the Administration for the next fiscal year would cover its costs if these routes were out, so Federal thinking goes. By a formula involving excess of costs over revenues, but not including human needs or other "people factors", the DOT arrived at its recommendation. A flurry of protests is sure to be elicited by the report.

MAJOR AGREEMENT REACHED BETWEEN UNIONS AND RAILROADS

An important agreement was reached late this month by 15 unions covering half a million workers and representatives of the nation's railroads. It calls for a 4% pay increase, with a total 10.7% wage and fringe benefit increase over an 18-month period. It was hailed as an admirable example of bargaining, and eliminates one important strike threat while not contributing significantly to inflation. The pact, if finally ratified, will take effect July 1.

SUMMARY OF SCHEDULE CHANGES FOR AMTRAK FOR THE COMING MONTHS

In recent issues of RTN we have reported changes and rumored changes for the coming spring and summer. Here we attempt to summarize and verify the changes that have come to the fore. Effective April 29 or 30 (there are conflicting reports of date), these changes will take place: the CHAMPION will leave New York after 5pm instead of 3:50, continuing to run thru the summer. Amtrak is considering additional weekend trains between New York, Raleigh, Columbia and Savannah. The MONTREALER will leave Washington one hour earlier and the WASHINGTONIAN will leave Montreal at a "slightly later hour." There will be Friday and Sunday Washington Metroliner departures at 7pm, and one leaving New York 11:30pm those days. Also, a 7:30pm Metroliner departure from N.Y. will be made on Sundays.

With the summer, June 10 timetables, daily service on the COAST STARLIGHT and the SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR is expected to begin. There is no verification that other tri-weekly trains will change to daily schedules. There is still talk of routing the NORTH COAST HIAWATHA directly into Portland, but Amtrak could not verify this. It is now physically possible to run the EMPIRE BUILDER into Seattle by the Great Northern route since the completion of a new bridge at Spokane. Whether Amtrak may do this in the future is not known. There is also still talk of a Los Angeles-Ogden train via UP but no official verification. The SAN JOAQUIN DAYLIGHT should begin running sometime probably in late summer. Martinez will be added as a stop for the STARLIGHT and S.F. ZEPHYR and Truckee as a station for the latter train. (These station changes

(continued on page 13)

AMTRAK RELEASES JANUARY ON-TIME PERFORMANCE DATA

Amtrak, in a February 28 press release, gave out the on-time performance of its trains during the first month of the year. The system-wide total was 66.2% on time, up from 62.8% in December. Metroliners jumped from 69.3 to 70.9. Other corridor trains rose from 71.8 to 76.7, while long-distance trains improved to 34.6 from a figure of 32.5 per cent on time in December. According to the corporation, alternate freezing and thawing over much of the country from winter temperature changes caused many problems with track and signal switches. The greatest source of delays in January was from slow orders, often caused by weather-induced track shifting. Amtrak listed another prime cause as servicing in stations, usually brought on by need for extra fuel and water due to winter weather. For the first time, Amtrak included a ridership figure along with its on-time performance data, noting that the average daily system-wide ridership for January was 50,445, or 7.684 lower than the peak travel month of December. Another innovation was the reporting of TurboTrain data separately: the 193 Turbo runs completed in January were 52.3% on time, by Amtrak's five-minute standard. Worst systemwide performance was put in by the Chicago-New Orleans train, which was late every single run (in December the figure was 4.8%). Best on-time trains were the SAN DIEGANS, with 97.8% on-time arrivals.

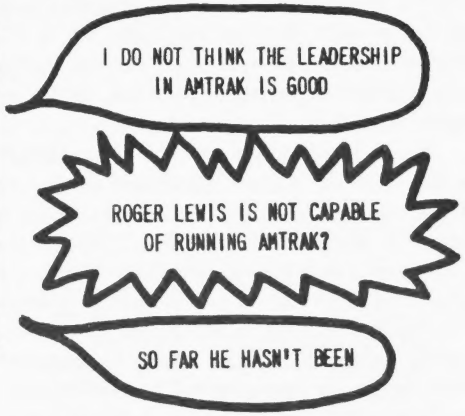
Amtrak has come under fire in some parts for placing too much emphasis on its on-time data, an act which diverts attention from other very pressing problems, such as the proper assignment of adequate consists to handle passenger needs (see separate item below). Except in some very blatant cases, such as that of the PANAMA LIMITED, the reasoning of critics is that long-distance trains in particular do not suffer ridership problems due to relatively small delays--after all, what's 15 or 20 minutes one way or another compared to a total 48-hour trip?--but do suffer patronage losses from other problems which are not so easily tallied as simple timekeeping records are.

AMTRAK REPORTED TURNING AWAY REVENUE PASSENGERS

There is evidence that at least on some trains at some times Amtrak is losing up to 50% of its possible revenue because of failure to provide sufficient cars in consists, particularly in the "off-season." The SUPER CHIEF/EL CAPITAN has on many days since the first of the year turned away potential passengers because of short consists. On some days only three coaches and three sleepers are run. Roomettes often are sold out for up to 10-day periods, yet only one sleeper having 10 roomettes is usually operated. The COAST DAYLIGHT also experiences sold-out days, yet continues to run with only a 3-coach consist at times. Amtrak's operating department seems to be having problems in watching the demand for space far enough in advance. Another problem is the new edict from Amtrak that certain trains such as the BROADWAY LTD and the COAST STARLIGHT should run with only Amtrak-painted cars in the consist. If extra cars must be added they cannot be put on unless the exterior has red and blue stripes. Critics are asking why the exterior paint is of more importance than the accommodation to the public of adequate space and the badly-needed revenue that is being lost. Another problem is the perennial one of non-communication between points along a route and the fact that no central computerized system yet handles these decisions. For example, Los Angeles and San Francisco are each assigned a given number of spaces on the Coast trains, and if one office sells a space for a short distance it is considered as taken for the entire L.A.-Seattle route even if the trip is only L.A.-Santa Barbara. Expensive phone calls must be made between offices to try to determine what space is still open, and clerks are usually unwilling to or do not have time to make these determinations. These problems all mean loss of money for Amtrak and will not be resolved, it appears, until adequate equipment is on hand and the antiquated reservations procedure has been finally modernized.

CBS TELEVISION PREPARES SPECIAL DOCUMENTARY ON AMTRAK

Sen. Hartke, the challenger



The eye of CBS was on Amtrak at prime time on Sunday, March 11, when about twenty minutes of the "Sixty Minutes" news program with Mike Wallace was devoted to a display of some of Amtrak's nastiest problems.

With the assistance of RTN and numerous other sources, CBS gathered photographic documentation of current passenger train difficulties. Camera crews filmed Southern Pacific auto-rack cars moving thru snowsheds from which smaller domes are banished by the railroad. These did not appear in the final edited program. Instead, the network concentrated on problems on the Penn Central, in particular the infamous Kankakee slow order which causes the JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY and GEORGE WASHINGTON to run at only 10mph in places where track is bad. A CBS crew rode the RILEY from Indianapolis to Chicago, interviewing passengers and a conductor enroute, and showing repeatedly autos on an adjoining highway moving along far faster than the train.

The focus was on the badly-maintained track of the PC, and Senator Vance Hartke appeared with the interviewer pulling spikes out of the ties by hand and commiserating on the state of the roadbed. "That's certainly no way to run a railroad, and I'm absolutely as disgusted as you can be. Take Indianapolis to Chicago," remarked Hartke, "ought to be able to do that in an hour and a half easy." The Senator got a plug in for his legislation to establish a government corporation to take over the right-of-way, renovate it, and lease it back to the railroads. But the hottest comment of the evening was Hartke's attack on Amtrak President Roger Lewis: "I don't think he has that type of imagination, that type of dedication to really continuing this operation. I'm not

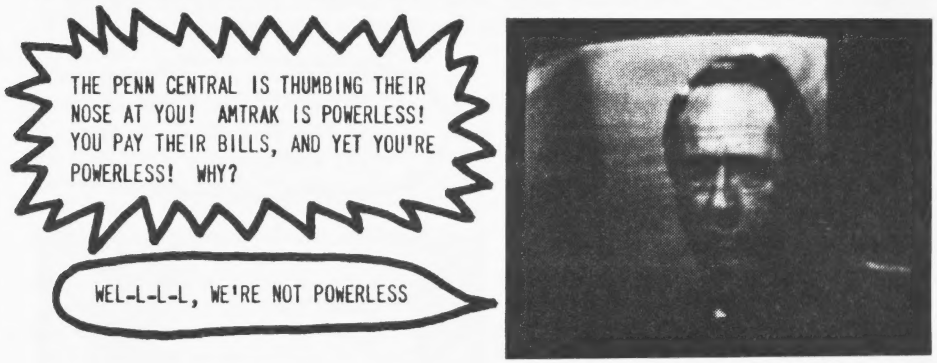
BN's Lou Menk in his private car

sure he wants to keep it going. I'm not sure that he himself is dedicated to a continuity of passenger service for people." At this the interviewer interjected, "Now wait a second. What you're suggesting is that he's taken a job to preside over the demise of passenger traffic?" Replied Hartke, "We have people, you know, who are in the liquidation business, you know, in business all thru the country. And I think maybe Roger Lewis is one of them."

Amtrak Board Member and Burlington Northern Chairman Louis Menk was interviewed in a BN office car and was questioned why his railroad paid over $33 million for Amtrak stock and carries it on its books as valued at one dollar. Menk allowed as how the stock is worthless "in the context of the present time." When asked, "You feel that passenger trains by and large with the exception of in the highly populated corridors should be permitted to die an honorable death, right?" Menk replied simply "Yes sir."

Finally the program got around to talking with Roger Lewis, whose replies were mainly defensive in light of the interviewer's sharp probing. But Lewis made clear that Amtrak is "very, very dissatisfied with the on-time performance of most of the railroads that run our trains." Later, attempting the final putdown, the CBS man told Lewis: "Face it, Mr. Lewis! Nobody in the Administration this moment seems to feel that passenger railroads are all that important. You are WAY down on the list of priorities!" But Lewis had a comeback: "We in Amtrak have a responsibility to the public to surface this argument so there can be a debate about the role of railroad passenger service... We spend tremendous amounts of money on transportation in this country, and a very small amount of that total directed to railroad passenger service would produce very significant results."

The program ended with views of European and Japanese trains "so much cleaner, faster, more comfortable than ours." In order to have such trains, "the American taxpayer will have to tell our leaders so and put up the money. If not, the JAMES WHIT-



A furrow-browed Roger Lewis

COMB RILEY will take its place alongside the stage coach in the catalog of American memorabilia."

Unfortunately, the program left a bad taste in the mouth of one who expected a balanced and thorough documentation of Amtrak at this point in time. While questions raised were important and valid, the press of time and the aggressive approach of the program directors made for great oversimplification of a complex issue, and may have done more harm than good to the cause of rail travel. CBS deliberately chose the worst of Amtrak to show the nation, paying little attention to its accomplishments. The intent was good, but the highway lobby itself could not have more effectively put down the cause of trains. Perhaps the program showed the faults of this type of photojournalism as much as it did the shortcomings of Amtrak.

The February 4000

by WES ROBERTS

BEING THE EXPLOITS OF A BAY AREA RAILFAN ON OVER 4000 MILES OF RAILS--AMTRAK AND NON-AMTRAK--DURING THE FEBRUARY OFF-SEASON

Looking forward to a 3-day Washington's Birthday holiday and a business trip to Colorado the four days following, I began to map out my midwinter ramble. With only the most necessary amount of air travel, I could manage five days of rail travel and in the process sample countless Amtrak meals, log 4,005 rail miles, spend time with friends in the Midwest, and add new routes to my map as well as retrace some of the most scenic rail miles accessible to passengers--the D&RGW's ex-CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR route. And, off-peak travel would avoid crowded trains and ease reservation hazards.

First leg of the trip was a red-eye special, the non-Pullman night flight from California to Minneapolis. A flight from 1:00 am to 4:09 am (California time) sprinkled with the usual snack tray, assorted buckling and unbuckling of seatbelts, and complimentary champagne (one of California's cheaper varieties) didn't leave much time for sleep, but it did deliver me into Minneapolis early Saturday morning, in time to race to the depot for the departure of the EMPIRE BUILDER for Chicago. Fortunately for me, Amtrak cooperated by arranging for No. 8 to be nearly an hour late, matching the late arrival of my flight into snowy. frozen Minneapolis.

The EMPIRE BUILDER pulled into Minneapolis exactly at 7:15, just as predicted when I called from the airport for information. I wondered why all Amtrak stations couldn't be as accurate with their arrival information. (Oakland, are you reading?) The arriving train was announced, and 45 minutes later, after dropping a sleeper and picking up an extra coach for the heavy local business to Chicago, number 8 was ready for boarding. I headed for the added coach at the rear, to find an old friend from California--SP 2359, a highwindowed coach, circa 1954, built for SHASTA DAYLIGHT service. Unfortunately, the old friend was a bit tired, with faulty heating and no lights, but I staked out my seat and in the best Paul Rayton tradition, raced for the diner and some stay-awake coffee. Breakfast, as I knew it would, maintained the consistently high standards I have come to expect of crews on the GN, NP, or CB&Q, although we were of course speeding down the Milwaukee's roadbed.

The mixture of services, crews, equipment, tableware, uniforms, and other facets of rail travel with the advent of Amtrak makes for interesting travel. Amtrak's nationwide standardization has its pros (such as vastly improved service standards on the Penn Central and Southern Pacific among others), but its cons (elimination of separate identities and unique services, for example) are the prices we must pay for a nationwide system. After a quick tour of the train, I returned to 2359 and settled down to several hours of alternately snoozing and gazing out at the white Wisconsin landscape, fully relaxing (except for the declining temperature in 2359) as I added new route miles to my rail atlas. Before reaching Milwaukee, I would join most of the other passengers in a forward march toward warmer accommodations, hoping that the difficulties would be repaired before 2359 made its next trip out from Chicago.

Joined by friends at both Milwaukee and Chicago, and having nothing better to do on this Saturday evening, we selected Amtrak's corridor service, the ABE LINCOLN, for a dinner ride to Bloomington. Return to Milwaukee would be aboard its companion, the PRAIRIE STATE. Another old western friend, ex-GN "Port of Seattle", now in Amtrak's new livery, brought the rear of No. 303 to a proper conclusion, fitting enough even for the Lucius Beebe segment of railfanning. Dinner was highly satisfying, aided by appropriate spirits, and the brief wait

at Bloomington (these trains were on time to the minute) afforded a chance to stretch and walk off part of the dessert in the brisk air.

Nitecaps in the PRAIRIE STATE returning to Milwaukee rounded out a long day and some 760 miles of Amtrakking. The attendant's refusal to accept Rail Travel Cards in payment for drinks was accompanied by some unprintable phrases about railfans, but we persisted and won. For a while, it was just like the old days (before 1971) on the SP, when a passenger really had to try harder. Still, travels since A-Day, May 1, 1971, have shown continuing improvements, and perhaps this man too will one day graduate from Amtrak's charm school.

Sunday found us again traversing the Milwaukee's famous raceway to Chicago, this time on number 324, the "local" Hiawatha service. Our minitrain, one of those likely to be replaced by TurboTrain service this summer, consisted of an NP coach; Amtrak 8401--a coach diner built originally for GN's INTERNATIONAL and now sharply dressed up with Amtrak Blue carpet, bright slip covers, and the rest of the treatment; and BN 3480--uniquely constructed from a full coach in 1949. Dome cars on such trains as this make Westerners wonder why, after nearly two years of Amtrak, there still are no domes on the COAST DAYLIGHT. We have yet to hear a plausible explanation from 955 L'Enfant Plaza.

Rail mile 845, Chicago arrival, and time for a visit to Amtrak's Chicago Reservation Center. On a quiet, wintry Sunday during the off-season we had to imagine the chaos that prevailed here last summer. Our guided tour left us encouraged by the progress Amtrak is making with its computerized reservation system. I checked on my own reservations, and to my relief found them safe and securely noted on the screen. Lest one think that all is automated beyond human comprehension, we were assured that the system primarily utilizes the computer to store the traditional car diagrams (altho in a newer format) and that good judgment by the reservations clerks throughout the nation still must be exercised in selecting desired accommodations. When the system is extended nationwide, clerks in Amtrak's various reservation centers will be able in a matter of seconds to determine the consist of each train and to "call up" the reservation diagram of any car on the train, scan it for available space, and enter a new reservation. When car assignments finally settle down as Amtrak's refurbishing program continues, a clerk with a ready knowledge of equipment types might even be able to secure the legendary "window seat, coean side, in the car next to the diner" for the little lady in tennis shoes from Pasadena!

Even a quiet Sunday afternoon at Chicago's Union Station is a train watcher's paradise--at least to one accustomed to only one or two trains and to the infamous tri-weekly schedules. Some 14 arrivals and departures between 1:00 and 4:30pm, excluding Milwaukee and BN commute services, offer an opportunity to see all types and conditions of equipment. Amtrak's pride, the BROADWAY LIMITED, left with an all-Amtrak consist (if one excludes the PC power), altho its image was tarnished by the peeling paint on the bedroom-lounge "Wawasee"--perhaps testimony to improper painting during the race to get a 100% "Amtrak" train into service. By the way, don't expect all cars with red and blue striping to have refurbished interiors. Many have received only mechanical or exterior treatment, and the bright new interiors must await subsequent shopping efforts. The tri-weekly SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR (still identified as the CITY OF SAN FRANCISCO on Union Station trainboards) left with a bevy of happy passengers, a string of ex-CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR sleepers, and Amtrak-renovated SP dome lounge 3601--one of the only 5 domes permitted to operate over SP trackage.

A quick visit to Amtrak's office in Union Station secured an Oct. 29, 1972 timetable, an Amtrak coloring book, and Amtrak's complimentary baggage tags--all items that are rare out West.

We concluded Sunday's railfanning by returning to Milwaukee on No. 325, another Hiawatha service train which included one of Amtrak's ridiculous backwards-riding domes (if the seats can't be turned, why not affix them permanently with half facing in each direction?) and our old friend SP 2359, still without lights and heat. But we were on time all the way, and appetites and thirsts could be satisfied in UP diner 4812.

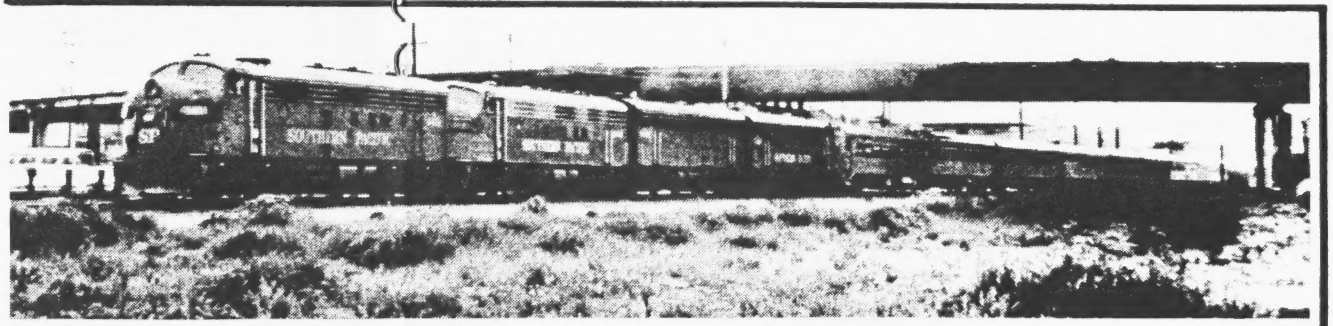
Starting to feel like a Chicago-Milwaukee commuter, I was back on No. 324 Monday, heading for Chicago and a few hours of exploration on the CTA before my rendevous with the DENVER ZEPHYR. Union Station was bustling by late afternoon. The Burlington managed to delay the departure of No. 55, the DENVER ZEPHYR, long enough to put my train side by side with the 4:40 commute, and we raced out, in the best of big station traditions, side by side until after rounding the curve at Halsted Street and turning southwest. The ZEPHYR, tonight destined only for Denver, proved again that the combination of Burlington and Amtrak can produce on-time performance and qualit service. Contrary to previous warnings an to reports in RTN, I found the ride in my roomette in "Silver Ravine," at the tail o the train, pleasantly smooth. Perhaps my slumber was helped by the wine accompanyin my dinner. Patronage was light and the train was short--a baggage car, 3 coaches, diner, the dome buffet lounge "Silver Kettle" built for the 1956 DENVER ZEPHYR consist, a slumbercoach, and the "Silver Ravine." Power was a mixture of Burlington and UP, and the three engines brought us into Denver (mile 2049) almost 20 minutes early.

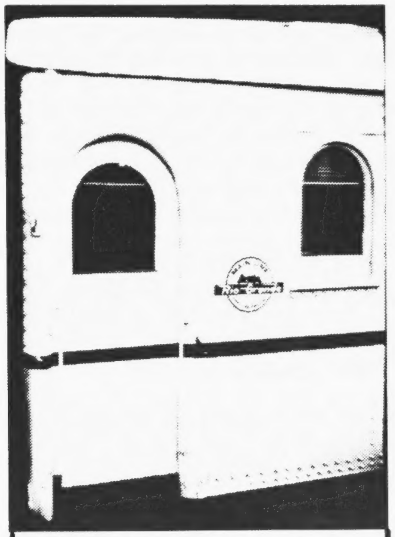
The sun was warm and the sky was bright foretelling an exciting trip on the RIO GRANDE ZEPHYR. Denver Union Station was a center of activity, since our 7:30am departure for Salt Lake City would be followed five minutes later by the Rio Grande's Ski Train, heading for Winter Park at the west end of Moffat Tunnel. We had time to walk the length of the ski train--a remarkable sight in this day of streamlined equipment Here were heavyweight coaches purchased fo ski and special train use some years ago from the Northern Pacific. The slight attempt at modernization clearly showed where arched windows had been blanked out. Painted in Rio Grande silver and orange, they were coupled to a lightweight combine, and powered by two freight units. Steam was provided by a converted tender. The train was sold out, and its load of ski buffs obviously was ready to enjoy a fine day on the slopes.

On the adjoining track was the 6-car ZEPHYR--the tri-weekly remnant of the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR. Having heard that this train often runs during winter months with

AMERICA'S SECOND MOST SUCCESSFUL TRAIN

The East has its Metroliners, but the West has the RENO FUN TRAIN, a vehicle always brimful of people, doing a great public service by keeping 700 people at a clip off the treacherous highway from San Francisco to Reno. Here, on the darkest of gloomy days, with rain pouring down, the Feb. 27 train heads out of Oakland and past the former Berkeley station on an experimental mid-week departure--the only one this year to deviate from the weekend schedule. Despite the weather, the train was jammed.





Closeup of the arched vestibule door of one of the heavyweight cars on the Rio Grande Ski Train.

as few as 5 to 10 revenue passengers, we were pleasantly surprised by the train length--combine, three dome coaches, diner, and sleeper observation--and the number of passengers boarding at this early hour. Over 100 boarded the immaculate train, altho most would not go thru to Salt Lake, since there were several groups traveling to Glenwood Springs or Grand Junction to return the next day on the eastbound run. At 7:30 sharp we slid smoothly alongside the ski train and began one of the most spectacular railroad climbs in the nation.

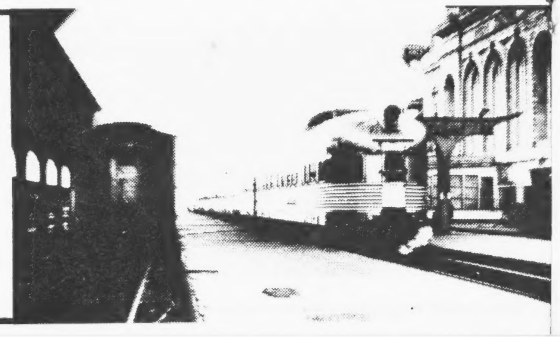
In the 49.6 miles from Denver to Moffat Tunnel, the Rio Grande tracks climb 3912 feet towards the Continental Divide with spectacular vistas of the plains. Tunnels abound as the train pierces the rocky escarpment. Vegetation changed from the grasses of the prairie to the timber of the highlands, and the magic of frozen snow gave it all a fresh sparkle.

Rio Grande knows how to move passengers and freight. During 11 hours of daylight from Denver to Helper, we must have passed more than 10 freights, and each meet was performed with precision. We never waited for a freight, and I doubt they halted long for our passage. Timetable precision, aided by CTC.

The ascent to Moffat Tunnel, the steady pace thru Glenwood Canyon, and the continual motion as we headed west across the moon-like landscape of Western Colorado and Utah was welcome. There's something restful and serene about a passenger train that keeps moving, as opposed to one that continually stops for uncounted unexplained reasons. Somehow your anxiety level falls, as the steady motion of your forward journey continues.

So much has been written about the scenery along this route that we won't repeat it here. The spectacular piece of America traversed by the Rio Grande has to be seen first hand to be appreciated--and in different seasons as well. My previous trip, in early summer, was as if I had traversed a different locale. And how better to see it and appreciate the vastness of America than from the dome.

Naturally too the daylong trip west to Salt Lake must be punctuated by the usual meals. Eating on the Rio Grande is easy. The food is reasonably priced, the menu affords a wide selection, and the service was above question. We can heartily recommend the breakfast steak and eggs as one of the best bargains anywhere. The homemade pie also warrants high praise--apple for lunch, and cherry for dinner on our trip.



The bright morning sun gleaming on its silver sides, the RIO GRANDE ZEPHYR waits for departure from Denver Union Station. At the left, the rear of the ski train is seen on the adjoining track. Photos by the author.

Since the demise of the CALIFORNIA ZEPHYR and the institution of tri-weekly service by the RIO GRANDE ZEPHYR, the Rio Grande has carried out a shopping and redecorating program on its remaining passenger equipment. Drapes have replaced the venetian blinds, carpets have been renewed, and interiors repainted. Seats are redone in shades of tan naugahyde. While not as striking as Amtrak's electric blue and red colors, the interiors are well done, and are kept clean. Outside, the former CZ cars have lost their letterboards, and the only indicating marks are the car numbers, names, and the D&RGW initials at the ends. The combine, the only car not once part of the CZ, has been painted silver to match the other cars. Rooms in the tail car (3 bedrooms, one drawing room) can be reserved by first class passengers, but the observation's lounge and dome are open to all.

Rio Grande provides a connecting limousine (the definition is loosely interpreted) service from Salt Lake to Ogden, to make its ICC-mandated connection with the SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR. About the best one can say is that it beats walking.

Amtrak No. 5, the SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR, was in Ogden early tonight. As the power was being changed we inspected the train that would carry us thru to Oakland. The consist was standard for the off-season: a UP baggage dormitory car, sleepers UP "Pacific View," Amtrak "Palm Haven" (formerly Santa Fe), and BN 1412; Burlington diner "Silver Cuisine"; SP dome lounge 3602, and coaches Santa Fe 2845, Amtrak 4480, and Santa Fe 2842. (Four additional SP coaches would be added at Sparks to handle the heavy weekend business between Reno and the Bay Area.) Then we headed for the comfort of our sleeper. We wanted to get up early to beat the "Reno crowd" to the diner and stake out our seats in the dome, for the assault on the High Sierra.

SP delivered us smoothly and early into Sparks, where we stretched legs during the service stop. Then it was off to the mountains. Like the Rio Grande, SP's route over Donner Pass ascends the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada mountains in a steady procession of tunnels, curves, snowsheds, and spectacular views. Donner Lake was frozen far below the tracks as we passed thru the concrete snowsheds that have replaced nearly all of the famous timber sheds. From the summit at Norden, we steadily descended the western slope of the Sierra along the route of the first transcontinental, the Central Pacific of 1869. (A newer, essentially parallel eastbound line was built early in this century; westbound trains follow the original alignment with only minor relocations.) After a final lunch as we rolled across the flat Sacramento Valley toward SP's gigantic lift bridge at Benicia, we assembled assorted coats, bags and camera equipment for our Oakland arrival. Mile 4005 came ten minutes early.

RIDING THE SNOWBALL SPECIAL

by Peter Bretz

Armed with a portable tape machine, a "Tracks Are Back" button, and official sanction to "write about the train," I boarded the SNOWBALL SPECIAL which departed Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal on March 2.

The train was made up of three UP "E" units (A,B,A), Santa Fe baggage car and four coaches, UP Cafeteria car 4003 (rebuilt lunch counter dinette); UP sleepers "Pacific Beach" and "Pacific Ocean"; SP sleeper 9008; Santa Fe sleepers "Palm Tower" and "Regal River"; and Amtrak Tavern-Observation 3341 (ex-SAL 6601).

The train was mostly full, with only one or two bedrooms unsold at departure time. The tavern-observation was already jammed with happy passengers about 20 minutes before departure. The booze flowed freely. Most were jet-set, ski crowd young people in a festive mood. Making my way thru the throng to the rear end, I ran into a girl I had gone to college with--long time, no see. Asking her the reason for going alone, she replied that this was her third ski train trip. It was a good way to meet people, she said. This seemed to be the general reaction, with plenty of single people aboard. At the extreme rear of the car, amplification gear was being set up for live music.

There were some problems, however. The lounge was on the rear (by necessity), but previous trips had a lounge mid-train. This was much more convenient as a middle of the train gathering place, and easier to reach. Also, the train usually had a baggage car set up for dancing and/or meeting. The Sun Valley Travels people who sponsored the train said that they looked "all over the country" but Amtrak was eleven baggage cars short just in the West, hence nothing was available for the trip. "It's really too bad," it was said, "because the big breweries--Coors, Budweiser and Schlitz--had offered free kegs of beer for the trip." Now they couldn't use it. The fact that the air conditioning in the rear section of the tavern-observation wasn't working didn't help matters, nor the trouble with getting electric power to the musicians.

Yet, despite all, everyone was looking forward to a week in the Idaho snow.

We left 7 minutes late because of the electricians working on board. Heading out of the throat of the terminal, we headed right across the L.A. River and onto Union Pacific tracks. The train continued slowly--about 25mph--until after the East Los Angeles yards, then highballed along the route of the old CITY OF LOS ANGELES. These SNOWBALL SPECIALS have been virtually the only passenger trains to use this section of the UP since May 2, 1971, when #103-104 ran for the last time.

Because of lack of proper open-passenger facilities, we sped right thru Pomona and Riverside, pulling into San Bernardino about 5:55pm. It took a few minutes to load more passengers; then off they went leaving at 6:24pm for Ketchum, Idaho, and leaving me to catch the SUPER CHIEF back to Los Angeles the next morning.

STATE OF THE TRACK ALONG THE SUSQUEHANNA

Via the BROADWAY LIMITED Washington connection, I journeyed from Harrisburg to Baltimore on Feb. 25, my first trip over the line in that direction. It was made primarily to see what had happened during the three-week period in which track work had taken place along the line paralleling the Susquehanna River. During the period of the work, the NATIONAL LIMITED connection was replaced by a bus on certain days, and the BROADWAY LIMITED ran via Philadelphia.

The train was 40mins late into Harrisburg that sunny Sunday morning, arriving at 6:50am. The consist was all refurbished, in Amtrak colors. The switching, which involved pulling the Washington baggage car off the front and the 3 Washington cars off the rear, was accomplished in less than the alloted time, with the New York section leaving 15mins later and our shorter consist a couple minutes after that. Aside from the baggage car, we had a legrest coach, 10-6 sleeper, and the 6-bedroom flat-end observation lounge, the "Dana." This final car provides food service between Harrisburg and Washington, and is nicely appointed inside with lounge chairs and several tables. The passenger load seemed fairly good for this off-season part of the year.

The track along the river proved to be a thing of contrasts. There were some smooth new sections of welded rail, to be sure. But it was obvious from equipment and supplies along the right of way that work was still in progress along a couple sections. And the bouncing, swaying quality of the ride at the rear of the "Dana" in a few places showed that some stretches had not been touched. At best, the line along the Susquehanna is a twisting, turning affair not suited for high speed operation--but quite worthwhile from a scenic point of view.

Two hours after leaving Harrisburg (about 70 miles) we joined the main line at Perryville, MD. We then sailed along at 80mph and arrived in Baltimore 30mins later--at 9:43--28mins late. This was virtually the same amount of lateness as when we departed Harrisburg.

While enjoying a cup of coffee in the "Dana," a ran into a casual acquaintance who is a rail enthusiast, and who was just returning to Baltimore from a round trip to the West Coast. He reported enjoyable trips on the SAN FRANCISCO ZEPHYR going out and the SUPER CHIEF returning, with on-time arrivals at Oakland and Chicago.

--Ken Maylath

(continued from page 3)

should be effective the end of April.) The FLORIDIAN is expected to return to a 2 nights-1 day schedule sometime in the near future. "In late summer or early autumn" the TurboTrain service Chicago-Milwaukee and Chicago-St. Louis, using French and American trains, will begin. The French trains should arrive here by late July.

The systemwide fare increase reported here earlier has apparently been dropped, and instead adjustments will be made piecemeal. Some of these are rather sweeping, however. Amtrak's present plan is to disallow family plan fares for trips that begin on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays (effective in May). In addition, fare increases will be inaugurated for Los Angeles-San Diego and Portland-Seattle, tho not over the entire COAST STARLIGHT route. Likewise, rates on portions of the Chicago-Seattle route will be increased. It is recommended that you make your reservations now while space is available and prices are lower. BROADWAY LIMITED coach reservations will no longer be made by seat number, effective in May.

Mixed Train of Thoughts

AMTRAK IS REBUILDING some Milwaukee Road E9 engines to like-new condition, and is expected to announce an order for new electric locomotives shortly. Amtrak signed (March 7) three contracts for RTG French Turbos to use out of Chicago. One contract is to lease two 5-car, 324-seat trains at least 18 months, with option to buy them after a year, and option to buy up to eight more such trains. The other two contracts cover a 7-member European technical group to advise on building a maintenance facility for the trains at Chicago, and for 6 months' worth of spare parts. The technical group will also help train personnel to run the trains, and will advise on maintaining equipment..... AMTRAK MADE FOUR important managerial appointments this month. Robert Hopkins of Omaha, former ass't to VP-Operations of UP, became General Manager of Operations, will report to F. S. King, VP-Operations, and will be responsible for day-to-day operations of the system. Neal D. Owen of Salem, Wisc., who was ass't to VP-Operations for Milwaukee Road, became System Manager of Passenger Service. David L. Struebing of Orlando, an Aerospace man, became System Manager for Reservations and Information Services. Earle D. Adamson of St. Paul, of NYC and Burlington background, was made System Manager for Training and Administration..... THE ROHR CORPORATION, builder of those beautiful BART cars, has a $15 million contract from Amtrak to rebuild 300 pieces of Amtrak equipment, to be done by end of 1974, and is now advertising for skilled personnel to do the job..... AMTRAK RESCUES BUSES: in the heavy snow storm that began in the South on February 8, Amtrak trains came to the rescue of thousands of travelers stalled on the highways. At least 1000 Greyhound passengers were among those taken aboard from the snowed-in buses, and perhaps 2000 other travelers attempting to go by highway in the two-day crisis. Extra cars were placed on all trains heading south from Washington as the emergency built up. Greyhound transfers were accepted by the rail corporation..... THE SUPER CHIEF has received a new music system on one consist (George Hyko will be happy to hear this--see RTN, Oct. 16, 1972) and within 6 months the entire set of trains is expected to be changed over to the modern audio equipment..... AN AMTRAK BOULEVARD? Yes, a teenage railfan managed to get the short street in McGregor, Texas changed to Amtrak Boulevard. The street number of the train station there is 2079, reports Amtrak's "Update" newsletter (Feb. 19)..... AMTRAK TELEVISION COMMERCIALS began appearing in Northeast cities Feb. 14. There are 30- and 60-second spots for the Metroliners. In addition, reports "Update," a Corridor campaign involving newspaper ads and radio spots is carrying the theme "Easy Does It--Amtrak Does It." Forty-four cities are running the radio commercials..... UNIFORM SMOKING POLICY on Amtrak trains will take effect as soon as it can be implemented: smoking allowed in sleepers, lounges, diners and restroom lounges; not permitted in coaches unless specifically stated; no cigar and pipe smoking in parlor cars.....

AMTRAK HAS ADOPTED a policy of serving aged and handicapped passengers thru its terminals and on trains. Employees will be trained in techniques for helping such travelers..... AMTRAK'S "FREE WHEELS" program is to be extended to the West, and to passengers originating in Montreal (the program gives special rental car use to Amtrak travelers--see RTN, 4-17-72)..... THE DECISION BY Amtrak to use SP tracks between Dallas and Houston (see last issue) came as a surprise to SP, and represents a rare instance of Amtrak's stepping in and using its contractual rights without pussy-footing about with the railroads. The SUNBEAM, HUSTLER, and OVERNIGHT LARK used to run on those tracks, but they've been freight-only for some time..... NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF Railroad Passengers reports that Joseph Vranich has joined Amtrak as Senior Economic Analyst, and Robert J. Casey replaces him as Executive Director of NARP..... CHICAGO ADVISORY COMMITTEE for Amtrak this month held a meeting aboard the ABRAHAM LINCOLN..... A METROLINER ACCIDENT March 14 in Cheverly, MD injured 13. Train 113 had stopped because of problems with a wheel, and a 2-car PC work train backed into it, seriously injuring the work train engineer. One other person was hospitalized... COAST STARLIGHT ROUTE brochures are now out--a full color glossy sheet folded into quadrants. One side is color photos of people around trains and a shot of the Santa Barbara station. Two other slick color brochures have just appeared--"Amtrak's Popular Eastern Trains" and "Great Amtrak Trains in the West." Both are highly recommended. A new SILVER METEOR route brochure also appeared in February..... WHAT HAPPENED TO the FLYING SCOTSMAN after leaving the U.S.? It returned to England to be renovated at Derby, and will go to the Nat'l Rwy Museum at York (see Manchester Guardian, March 3)..... ALAN M. CROSSLEY of Waterford, CT was the reader who sent us the Turbo photo printed in the First Feb. issue.....

Urban-Suburban Transit

The opening of the next BART line, the Concord line from MacArthur Station, Oakland to Concord, CA will take place May 21. The final portion, the important line to San Francisco and Daly City will open next September, say BART officials... San Diego is taking progressive steps to get rid of the automobile problem. By lowering bus fares from 40¢ to 25¢ it increased ridership 40% in two months while cutting revenues only 15%... New Jersey's Master Plan for transportation has come under fire by a knowledgeable transportation man, L. A. Jenny, who has presented a plan of his own. Space does not permit us to do it justice here. Write for info to Frank C. Barry, Box 212, Harrington Park, NJ 07640..... The New York Times says (March 4) that the Administration in Washington is reassessing its role in transit, taking a second look at far-out air cushion vehicles and the like with greater skepticism in favor of transit solutions that have a faster payoff. Sounds wise..... The DOT announced March 8 a $4.1 million grant to Norfolk, VA to let the city take over its privately-owned bus system and buy 47 new buses..... "Corridor Trains for Florida?" is title of an article in Railway Age (Feb. 12) that details the planning going into several Florida urban areas to avoid the car problem that Los Angeles became infamous for. Quote: "California missed the train. We don't propose to make that mistake"..... "Bicycles U.S.A." is title of a national conference May 7-8 in Cambridge, MA, the DOT and Dept. of Interior jointly announced late last month.....

QUOTES OF THE WEEK***

"Amtrak doesn't really operate the trains. The railroads that have been clamoring all these years to get out of the passenger business still do. All Amtrak does is funnel money--to the 13 railroads in the Amtrak system. Since going into operation, Congress has given Amtrak over $200 million, and since that time Amtrak has lost it all."

--CBS "60 Minutes" TV program, March 22

(see article on page 5)

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